

Alerter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Retained Members www.fbu.org.uk

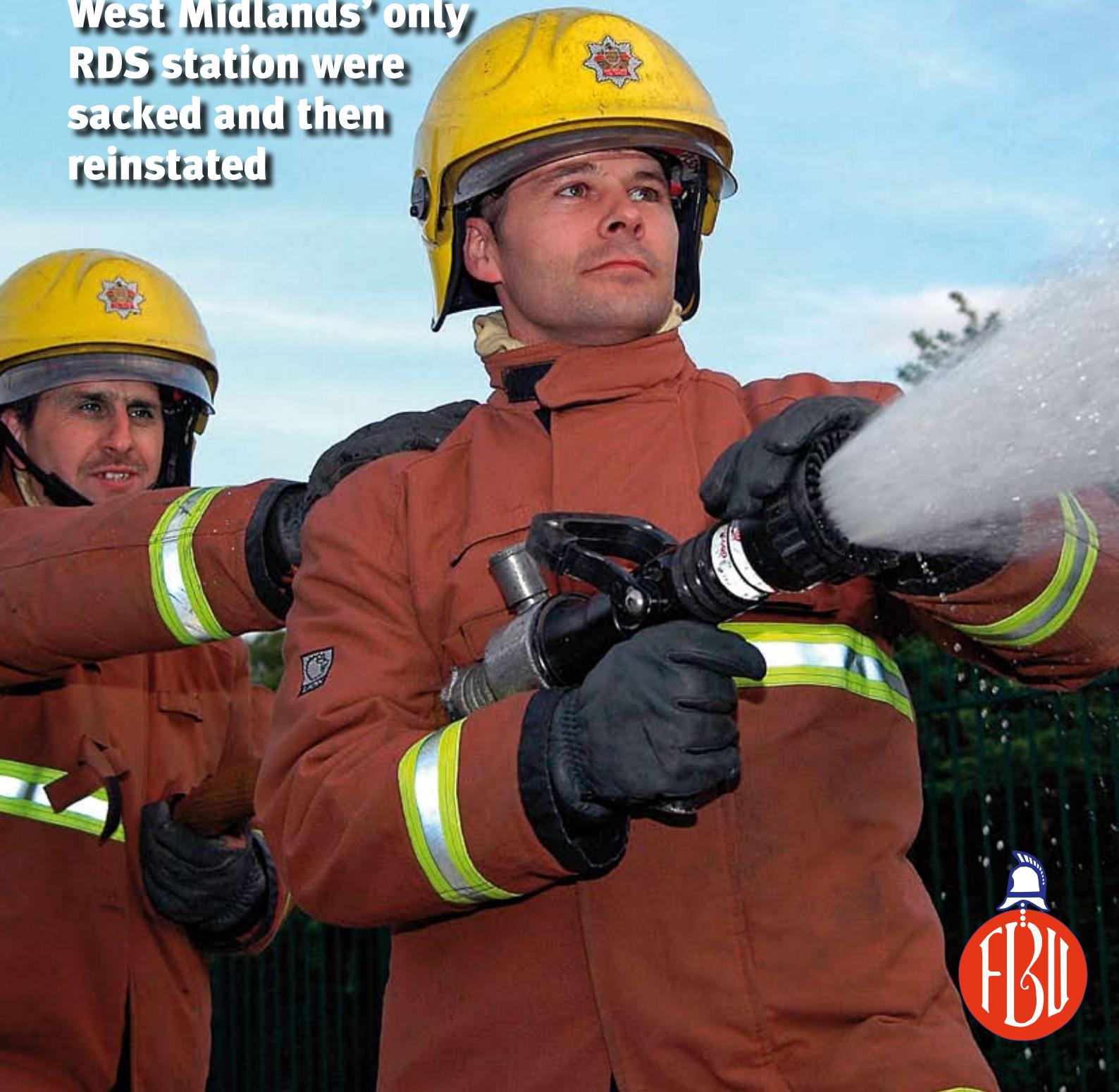
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Remember the dead ...
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it for you?**

Spring 2008

Sedgley

**How firefighters at the
West Midlands' only
RDS station were
sacked and then
reinstated**



Editorial



This is our first issue of 2008 and it is with great sadness we acknowledge the loss of our member in Central Scotland and four of our members in Warwickshire, and offer our deepest condolences to the families.

Many firefighters from all over the UK attended the funerals to show their respect and provide some comfort at such a difficult time.

The FBU officials in Warwickshire and West Midlands have been working extremely hard to ensure all of our members involved in the incident at Atherstone-on-Stour are being given support and assistance. They have also been assisting others who have been involved in the investigation, which is likely to be a long and difficult process for all involved. At the time of going to press we have also been informed that an improvement notice has been served on Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The new FBU membership pack has been well received in Brigades and is proving to be a winner with firefighters already working the retained duty system and new entrants. The National Retained Committee were pleased to be involved in the development of the packs. The FBU has secured the services of Daniel Giblin from the TUC to help make RDS firefighters aware of the opportunities available to them and assist in problems being faced by RDS staff in their employment. Watch out for Daniel when he visits your region. The FBU and its structure offers its members the ability to be involved from branch level right through to national committees. I would strongly urge all RDS FBU members to be active, get involved and have your say.

The new constitution of the National Joint Council has now been agreed, and as before the FBU is the only union which represents the RDS at national level. This again demonstrates our strength when it comes to negotiating with employers on issues of pay and conditions for all firefighters irrespective of the duty system they work.

The ongoing pensions issue is not a good advert for the recruitment of RDS firefighters at a time when establishment levels in many brigades are at an all time low. It is unacceptable that retained firefighters could potentially lose their main and RDS employment without receiving any pension provision. The recent changes to the guidance makes an ill-health pension almost impossible. The FBU is actively campaigning to address this issue and are holding meetings in all brigades across the country. I would strongly urge all RDS members to keep informed of this issue and to attend as many of the meetings that are held in their brigade as they can. This issue directly affects every firefighter regardless of duty system worked and it is imperative that we all work together to ensure common sense prevails.

In January, the final submissions were heard at the Employment Tribunal in Croydon where the union is fighting to allow RDS firefighters access to the Firefighters Pension Scheme, equal treatment on sick pay and additional responsibility payments. A decision is expected around Easter.

Tam Mitchell, Executive Council Member, Retained

You and the FBU



Resolutions reflect the FBU's vibrant retained section





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Establishment levels and recruitment of retained firefighters, bounty and salary schemes, retaining fee, and the process of transfer to wholetime and training were among the issues raised at the FBU's Retained Annual General Meeting in November 2007.

Some 40 delegates and officials from across the country travelled to the stately home Wortley Hall near Sheffield and represented at the meeting the firefighters working the retained duty system in their respec-

tive brigades and regions.

A wide range of high quality resolutions on areas of concern and interest to firefighters working the retained duty system were brought to the one-day AGM, underlining the vibrancy of the retained section of the FBU and the growing participation of retained members in the democratic structures of the Union.

One minute's silence (below) was observed for the four firefighters who lost their lives in Warwickshire in November 2007.



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Cover picture: Roy Peters

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CAMPAIGN NEWS

In short



◆ FF David (Davy) Crabb, of Station 95 Stonehaven, Grampian, died on Thursday 20 December 2007, aged 47 years, after a long battle with illness borne with great courage and dignity. Dedicated to his duties as a firefighter at Stonehaven for 18 years, Davy will be sadly missed by all of his many friends and colleagues in the FBU and Grampian Fire and Rescue Service who knew and worked with him during his distinguished service. Davy is survived by his loving wife Diane and sons Ryan and Matthew who are all very much in our thoughts at this time.

Leon Murray, Brigade Chair Grampian



◆ Over 200 learners, including a group from Portrush station (picture above), have completed courses under the FBU's Union Learning Fund Project in Northern Ireland, the majority RDS firefighters. Equality is a continuous thread throughout the project. All staff, regardless of the section of the workforce they are employed in, are being given the chance to access learning opportunities. Among training offered was drug awareness, which was introduced by tutors from the Workers Educational Association and is delivered on RDS stations at weekends. This is useful for the firefighters as it raises awareness of some of the dangers of drugs facing not only themselves but also their children.

Are you receiving normal pay?

MATERNITY PROVISION AND RDS

Many women RDS firefighters are not receiving normal pay when pregnant – and thus unable to attend fire calls – and are only receiving their retaining fee and drill night payment.

The Grey Book (Conditions of Service) Section 4, Part D, Paragraph 6, says that normal pay should apply throughout pregnancy prior to maternity leave and should be calculated in accordance with paragraph 34, which defines normal pay as being the employees average weekly remuneration in the previous 12 weeks (excluding any week in which they have been on sick leave or have received no pay), taking all payments into account.

Most maternity provisions are applied equally by Fire and Rescue Services across duty systems, but this situation facing women RDS firefighters has come to the attention of the FBU's National Women's Committee (NWC) and the National Retained Committee (NRC).

Says Kerry Baigent, secretary to the NWC: "If FRS don't pay



women normal pay throughout their pregnancy then these women are receiving an often substantial decrease in their monthly pay, which not only affects them at this time, but would also contribute to them receiving lower pay while on maternity leave and in some cases leave them with their pay so low that they are not even entitled to receive Statutory Maternity Pay."

Nicky Clark an RDS firefighter from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, only found out she was entitled to maternity pay when she went to an FBU women's meeting in Taunton and met Kerry.

Nicky, a single parent, was out fitting smoke detectors the night before her daughter Amy arrived a week early. She was the only woman on her shift and had no idea she was entitled to normal pay (the previous 12 week average) whilst being pregnant and maternity pay as an RDS firefighter.

"Nobody mentioned it. There were no forms or anything. I just sent Kerry my pay slip, which included shouts and drills as well as the retained fee. The money was really useful when it came through."

If you think this is happening to you, then please get in touch with an FBU rep for advice.

Decision in legal case imminent

RETAINED PENSIONS

Aruling from the Croydon Employment Tribunal on the issue of retained pension rights could come within weeks. The final submissions were heard in January.

The Union is fighting to allow RDS firefighters access to the Firefighters Pension Scheme, equal treatment in respect of sick pay and additional responsibility payments.

The range and quality of the submissions was wide and extremely high as FBU members

from different ranks and roles in the fire service gave evidence.

National Retained Committee secretary Pete Preston said: "All those who gave evidence – from frontline firefighters to managers – did extremely well in presenting the evidence in what is a highly complex legal case.

"Professional RDS firefighters are the backbone of the fire and rescue service in many parts of the country. Yet employers continue to support their second class status. This legal case is about changing that."

The Union is represented by Thompsons.

MARTIN JENKINSON



Gwyn Williams (left), a retained firefighter from Colwyn Bay and employee of Indesit/Hotpoint at Kimmel Park, north Wales, with his former work supervisor who says his RDS work benefited the company

Employers 'happy' with releasing RDS employees

CLG SURVEY

Most current and former full-time employers of RDS firefighters are largely happy with the experience of releasing employees for RDS duties and in general there appear to be no insurmountable barriers to release staff for RDS, according to a new survey by the department for Communities and Local Government.

Organisations cited benefits of employing RDS firefighters as having staff with health and safety and first aid training; training in and experience of handling emergencies; ability to conduct fire safety checks; respect/prestige in the local community; and benefits to the local community.

The survey – based on interviews with 1,000 current and former employers, as well as those who have never released employees for retained fire fighter duties in England

– revealed that there is generally very little contact with the fire service or local fire station and that employers would welcome better communication as well as recognition for their support.

Among local employers, once they were made aware of the existence of the RDS the majority were receptive to the idea of giving support and willing to consider employees' future requests for release.

Ironically the report reveals that the organisations which are failing to release staff or adopt a pro-active approach to bringing their employees' attention to the need for more RDS firefighters and the benefits we bring to communities are the local authorities – who should be setting an example to other employers.

→ *The Retained Duty System: a survey of local employers is available at www.communities.gov.uk*

Firefighters brush up on maths and English

LIFELONG LEARNING

Over the last six months eight firefighters working on the retained duty system at Keynsham Fire Station, Avon, have been improving their maths, English and IT skills.

The group have had to work around shouts, changing shift patterns and family life in a bid to gain Skills for Life qualifications.

Their three months of weekly sessions at have now paid off with all achieving Level 2 passes in the subjects.

And the group have given their IT skills a boost as a result of the online

training and additional opportunities to follow tailored computing courses.

Almost £65,000 was awarded to Firing Up – Learning for Retained Firefighters, a project set up to promote lifelong learning opportunities across Avon and Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Services.

Initiated by the FBU, the project, which includes representatives from both Avon and Gloucestershire, successfully bid for funding from Learning Works for All, a partnership managed by South West TUC.

The project is being rolled out to around six retained fire stations within the AF&RS area.

Briefings



SEAN STARBUCK

National Officer

Workforce development

Workforce development for RDS firefighters has been under the spotlight during 2007 and has been raised by the FBU in many arenas. A recently published Communities and Local Government survey of how UK Fire and Rescue Services have implemented IPDS for staff conditioned to the Retained Duty System has confirmed many of our concerns.

Despite our insistence that a consistent approach is vital there are still areas that vary unacceptably throughout the UK fire and rescue service. Nowhere is this more visible than with respect to transferability from RDS to wholetime – more than 80% of FRAs still having no written policy to deal with this.

Half of the FRAs still expect an RDS firefighter to complete the full wholetime initial training course, even though most FRAs have a personal development review system in place. This is absolutely absurd and is an area that the FBU will be tackling management again on during 2008. What is the point of a personal development review system if the evidence gathered is not used as acquired prior knowledge when transferability is to be considered?

The FBU has been looking at vocational qualifications available to members and again it is apparent that there is a gap between what is available to wholetime and RDS firefighters. Theoretically when vocational qualifications are introduced into the workplace they must be available to the entire workforce but unfortunately in reality this is not the case. Many FRAs are not extending the opportunity to achieve vocational qualifications to RDS firefighters.

It's not all doom and gloom as more RDS firefighters are utilising opportunities made available through the Union Learning Project with many becoming Union Learning Reps for their stations.

The FBU goal is quite clear. Advancement opportunities should not depend on what duty system the individual works. The clue is in the name: workforce development.

'The Union a fantastic

Sedgley fire station has been a target for closure. As the only retained fire station in the whole of the West Midlands, its nine firefighters were something of an anomaly amongst a brigade of over 2,000 wholetime.

When charges of gross misconduct were levelled at the RDS firefighters suddenly an anomaly became a crisis for nine FBU members. Chris Downes, the FBU's West Midlands brigade membership secretary and Tony Nutting, secretary of FBU Region 7 (West Midlands Region), went immediately to their aid.

The brigade was making two claims: possible fraud from double claims whereby firefighters were being paid for station work while saying they went out on a shout and secondly, operating a turn-out rota that delayed turn-out by waiting for firefighters whose turn it was to go out on a shout. Chris Downes said there was an atmosphere of "utter devastation and disbelief. The rota system was the only one they had ever known. It had been used in Sedgley for the last 30 years." One of the nine, Martin Brindley, with over 30 years service was so crushed by the accusations he resigned in disgust.

The FBU mounted a campaign of support for the RDS firefighters, gathered evidence and then led the men into the hearings with the brigade which took five days to hear.

Chris Downes said the problems were obvious "the brigade had no real concept of the retained service. It was down to the interpretation of the Grey Book and the belief of the West Midlands management that the accused had struck at the very root of their contract with the West Midlands fire service.

"We worked long and hard to mount a

robust defence, as they were all completely innocent. For example, the brigade was claiming the firefighters claimed for testing hydrants on a Saturday – but that there weren't enough hydrants. But we showed that the firefighters had been told to merely use this term when they were actually doing a range of related work activities."

With a senior West Midlands brigade officer presiding over the hearings and two investigating officers presenting the cases, at times the proceedings became heated and fractious, particularly with the investigating officers.

However at the end of five days of hearings the verdict was guilty one and all. All were dismissed. The firefighters were once again sent reeling. But everyone, union and firefighters, held firm and an appeal was immediately lodged.

An even more senior officer was wheeled in to hear the appeals. Chris Downes could see a chink of daylight as the officer was remarkably fair: "the officer was scrupulously fair. He asked very pertinent questions of the investigating officers and the original presiding officer. But even he wasn't au fait with the nature of the retained. But we felt we could finally explain things. We disproved the majority of claims and allegations made by the brigade."

Chris Downes, Tony Nutting, Region 7 Chair, Tony Larose and Executive Council member for Region 7, Dave Whatton represented the firefighters throughout.

The judgement came in at nine o'clock on

Sedgley firefighter John Platt – got his job back with union support, but there is still more work to

ROY PETERS

'We worked long and hard to mount a robust defence, as they were all completely innocent'

the night of the last appeal hearing. All charges of gross misconduct against seven of the eight were dropped, and they were reinstated, but all with an 18-month final warning.

However, the Watch Commander was dismissed, and they wanted more time over the fate of the Crew Commander.

The next day word came through Crew Commander, Graham Blunt was to be demoted to firefighter. Legal advice is being sought about challenging this situation.

Chris Downes was pleased but felt the whole basis for the charges was misguided and the entire process so unnecessary. "I must pay tribute to the fire crew of Sedgley. They only wanted to serve their community. We need

'We were totally let down. But the FBU got involved and we got justice'

did job'



to get the Watch Commander reinstated. The whole thing was a case of teamwork. We felt it was unfair and that in the end reason and the sense of fair play won. The appeal officer saw there was no malice, these were 30-year-old practices the firefighters were following."

Sedgley RDS firefighter, 40-year-old Paul Dixon, with 13 years service, was shocked by the whole affair: "We didn't know what we were being charged with. We were then wrongly accused and then dismissed for something we weren't aware of.

"Friends and neighbours gave us their full support. The union guys did a fantastic job. The West Midlands fire service needs to learn more about how the retained work. They'd just let us get on with it for 30 years. The whole thing was shocking."

'The FBU doesn't differentiate between its members'

Mark Phillips, 39, with eight years service, was equally scathing. "We were totally let down. But the FBU got involved and we got justice. But the pain we and our families had to suffer was great. We've lost money from being dismissed and suspended and now we're just on the retained fee while we retrain. And we've had no apology."

Crew Commander, Graham Blunt, 51, who was demoted said he was angry. "I'm not happy with the way the West Midlands brigade handled the whole thing. And I'm even more disappointed for the Sub O, the Watch Commander, he had 34 years service.

"As for my demotion, it was like being punished even though there was nothing to be punished for. But I was well pleased with the union."

National Retained Committee (NRC) Secretary, Pete Preston, said the case showed that the FBU fights for all firefighters: "The Sedgley case clearly illustrates that the FBU doesn't differentiate between its members, whether wholetime or retained."

'The FBU threw the full weight of its resources behind the firefighters of Sedgley'

"Despite claims by other unions, the FBU threw the full weight of its resources at branch, brigade, regional and national level behind the firefighters of Sedgley."

The NRC was particularly impressed with the performance of the FBU West Midlands and Region 7 regional officials. Even though they have only one retained station, with nine members, but just under 2,000 wholetime members, their approach was just the same.

As Pete Preston says: "They clearly didn't differentiate and they were not shy in coming to us when they needed information about the national service and its practices. There is more work to do in Sedgley but so far, so good."

FBU MEM

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

- Securing a reduction from 178 hours to 120 hours a week cover requirement to be entitled to full retaining fees. As a result, very many Retained Duty System personnel have seen their retaining fees go up by £625.00 a year at firefighter level. And that's in addition to agreed percentage pay rises and considerable back pay.
- A vigorous and sustained campaign to win access to the Firefighters Pension Scheme for Retained Duty System personnel. The FBU is committed to pursue this to a successful conclusion.
- **Working to break down the barriers between differing duty systems. After all, a firefighter is a firefighter is a firefighter!**

LOCAL INITIATIVES

- Ensuring that brigades and fire and rescue services keep to nationally agreed rates of pay and that personnel receive the correct hourly rate for all activities – undertaking community fire safety duties, for instance.
- Negotiating extra days annual leave for Retained Duty System personnel above the 'Grey Book' provision.
- Negotiating paid administration time for Retained Duty System watch managers and crew managers outside of times allocated for training nights.
- Negotiating payment for FBU branch officials working on stations on the Retained Duty System who attend brigade management and union meetings on behalf of their members. In many places such officials are now paid for missed fire calls.
- **Ensuring that no member working the Retained Duty System is adversely affected by any pay rates under the new payments systems.**
- Successfully fighting off changes in working practices that would lead to the worsening of our members' working conditions and cuts in their pay for like for like work.

ACCIDENT AND INJURY FUND

- If you suffer an accident at work or elsewhere, the FBU Accident and Injury Fund (AIF) provides generous cash benefits on top of those we have negotiated with the fire and rescue service.
- Death benefit equivalent to a year's pay is payable upon the death of a member which does not have to arise from on-duty activity.

What's in it for you?

The Fire Brigades Union is the only trade union recognised at national and local level to negotiate working conditions for firefighters and emergency control room operators in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – whatever their duty system. On these pages we summarise what that can mean for retained duty service firefighters

REPRESENTATION

- In many brigades the majority of FBU work is looking after day to day issues affecting firefighters working the Retained Duty System.
- In all brigades and fire and rescue services across the country, we have successfully represented or advised thousands of members on employment issues, including medical appeals, pension appeals and disciplinary hearings resulting from both on duty and off duty incidents. With the resources and expertise of our solicitors, Thompsons, who specialise in dealing with trade union work, we can ensure that members get the best advice available.
- Only recently, the FBU overturned a management decision to enforce a firefighter working the Retained Duty System to retire on grounds of ill health. The union's officials worked very hard to ensure that they proved our member was fit enough to remain operational.
- In 2005 we achieved a resounding victory for the sacked 'Stornoway 8' – all Retained Duty System firefighters in Scotland. They all got their jobs back following our appeal to the Secretary of State who found in favour of the FBU.

BERSHIP

INFORMATION

The FBU aims to keep all members well informed.

■ Alerter is the union's magazine written for firefighters working the Retained Duty System by firefighters working the Retained Duty System. Alerter is posted to members at their home address. We encourage all members to contribute. If you would like to air your views and ask any questions, please email peter.preston@fbu.org.uk

■ All members of the FBU receive the union's national magazine *Firefighter* which is posted to home addresses nine times a year. *Firefighter* presents news and features on issues affecting members throughout the service, as well as international reports, health and safety and legal advice and general features.

■ Through the union's website www.fbu.org.uk you can keep up to date with FBU news and campaigns, find out about member services, and access information or workplace issues such as health and safety, pensions, and education and training.

■ The FBU electronic mailing list allows members to receive information at their home email address. To add your name to this list visit www.fbu.org.uk then enter your email address into the box in the bottom left of this page. This will ensure you receive all electronic correspondence sent out from head office. National, regional and brigade circulars are regularly emailed or posted into stations and to home addresses.

■ You can contact any of your officials listed at the end of this leaflet to discuss any issues or concerns you have.

TAKING PART

■ We encourage all members to take part in the union's business. Member participation is vital to the successes we achieve on your behalf.

■ Your officials will visit your branch if you invite them. Your National Retained Committee member will be happy to attend your brigade's meetings to answer your questions about firefighters working the Retained Duty System.

ACCIDENT CLAIMS

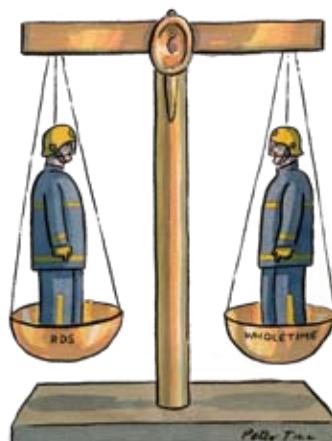
■ We have been particularly successful in winning personal accident claims for members and their families. Examples include:

■ Securing £250,000 compensation and a pension for a firefighter working the Retained Duty System who was injured at an incident which had resulted in this member being medically retired from both the brigade and full-time employment.

■ Successfully representing a member working the Retained Duty System, who was injured on the second day of initial training. Although the member had not even paid the first monthly subscription to the FBU, the union invested £70,000 in legal fees to support this firefighter. Without the help of the FBU our member would not have been able to fight the case.

■ Pursuing an industrial accident claim for a firefighter working the Retained Duty System, whose injuries were sustained in this member's primary employment. The FBU will represent both you and your family on personal injury claims, charging no fee and taking no part of any compensation award.

■ For further details please visit our website www.fbu.org.uk and click on the Legal Services link.



HOW THE FBU HELPED ONE MEMBER

— over page

PLUS

A union for ALL firefighters
a message from General
Secretary Matt Wrack
Listening to you
Meet Daniel Giblin

VALUE FOR MONEY

■ The cost of FBU membership for members working the Retained Duty System is linked to the wholetime Firefighter (Competent) rate of pay and adjusted accordingly.

■ FBU subscriptions enable our union and its officials to operate high profile and effective campaigns to protect and promote our members interests at local, regional and national levels.

■ When you consider the resources and back up available, there really is only one choice for effective representation – and that is the Fire Brigades Union.

'The FBU proved to be more than a just a service – it was also a true friend'

One member's experience shows why every firefighter needs to be a member of the FBU

Retired firefighter David Hare is only 37 years old but he can no longer work. When he was smashed on the head by an out-of-control hose during a drill, David had no idea the effect it would have on his life.

Following a night in hospital, he and his family and colleagues were shocked to discover that the injuries to his head and neck would leave him with a permanent disability, preventing him from working.

Unable to achieve even basic mobility with his neck and shoulders, he found his livelihood in tatters and yet the assessment from an independent qualified medical practitioner was that the injuries were not permanent, so he was not entitled to a disability pension from the brigade.

"Being a self-employed builder this meant I could no longer work in that profession. I was left in a situation where I couldn't provide for my family," said David.

As an FBU member with one year of RDS service at the Withernsea station

on Humberside, he turned to his local FBU reps. They immediately launched an investigation of his case.

When David showed brigade official Ian Murray his cracked fire helmet – which he had been given a few days after the accident as a memento – alarm bells started ringing in Ian's head about whether the accident investigation had been full and thorough. Surely the helmet would have been vital evidence and impounded?

Ian was proved right. "After some digging, we ascertained that David had been hit square on top of the head during a drill which, it turned out, wasn't a recognised drill. When we saw the independent qualified medical practitioner's report, the verdict was that David had suffered a whiplash type of injury, which are predominantly deemed non-permanent. Whereas he'd actually suffered a compression injury, which is a very different thing."

Ian took David to a Dr Brian Hamilton, a trauma specialist in Bradford, who confirmed the permanent nature of his injuries.



Ian was always there for me. He was absolutely amazing. He was available either by phone or in person 24/7 to help myself or my family. We would have been lost without him'

Armed with this evidence and the fact that David had not even been interviewed as part of the initial investigation, the FBU led the pension appeal, which, in the light of Dr Hamilton's evidence, found the brigade investigation to be flawed.

David was awarded a full ill-health pension and Dr Hamilton's evidence was also used to secure a much better personal injury award than had been offered.

But all this took four long years. "I'd always been so active," says David. "I'd played a lot of sport. I was so bloody down at times. It really affected my family. It was a major blow to my self-confidence."

"I soon began to spiral into depression but throughout Ian was always there for me. He was absolutely amazing. He was available either by phone or in person 24/7 to help myself or my family. We would have been lost without him. You often see adverts for trade unions which say 'you're never alone'. Well, the FBU proved to be more than a just a service – it was also a true friend."

GENERAL SECRETARY

Determined to end discrimination

You will see from this issue of *Alerter* something of the range of issues the Fire Brigades Union is addressing for Retained Duty System firefighters. Pensions rights, training and development, transferability ... These are just some of the issues around which the FBU is campaigning within the fire and rescue service.

The FBU has one central belief about representing firefighters. We are fighting for ALL firefighters – regardless of duty system.

We don't discriminate depending on what role you have. We don't discriminate depending on where you work or what duty system you are in.

We are fighting for the best possible deal for everyone within the service and also to ensure that our communities get the best possible treatment from a well-trained and properly resourced Fire Service.

Allowing ourselves to be divided

because of duty system or rank does nothing to improve things. It only weakens the voice of firefighters as a whole.

That is why the FBU is currently putting additional effort into identifying the issues facing Retained Duty System members. For retained firefighters we are determined to end discrimination which treats RDS members as second class – whether in the provision of equipment or in the right to training and development.

Over coming months the FBU will be putting together the key issues facing RDS members and presenting our demands to the employers and government.

Your National Retained Committee will be central to this, ensuring that RDS members are determining the way forward for RDS members. I hope that you will become involved in this.

Matt Wrack



We are fighting for ALL firefighters – regardless of duty system. We don't discriminate depending on what role you have. We don't discriminate depending on where you work or what duty system you are in



Listening to you

I'm Daniel Giblin and I'm a TUC Academy organiser. I will be working with the FBU until November this year, listening to the concerns and issues you are facing locally, assisting RDS staff with problems they encounter, ensure that these personnel, the majority of whom are FBU members, are aware of their rights and to give advice on other sources of assistance.

I may be just 25 years old. But as a PCS branch rep, regional organiser and a national representative for workers in the civil service, I've seen the result of many of the problems that you face in the fire service, whether they be workplace closures or pensions.

And I've learned from this experience that when we participate in our union and its campaigns, we can make a real difference.

For RDS members, balancing the demands of two jobs, it's sometimes a challenge to find the time to get active in the Union. But it's your Union and working together collectively is the best way to defend and promote your interests and those of the communities you serve and protect. And, of course, nobody knows your issues better than you.

I'll be visiting fire stations across the UK in the coming months and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible.

Meet the new members

Unprecedented numbers of retained firefighters have joined the FBU in recent months. Many factors are influencing the decision of the UK's RDS firefighters, but the main two reasons are the sterling work of FBU officials throughout the country fighting to support the retained and the lack of any real alternative union.

Increasingly, retained firefighters can see that the FBU has only one approach to the concerns and welfare of firefighters – whether wholetime or retained – and that is total support. In the same way you don't have a retained fire, the FBU doesn't differentiate between its firefighters – firefighters, are firefighters, are firefighters.

For example, throughout the length and breadth of Wales the volume of new FBU recruits has been heartening. In South Wales, RFU membership of serving firefighters is down to single figures, says FBU regional secretary, Grant Mayos: "The word about the benefits of the FBU and how we serve our members is spreading fast and that can only be good for those who work in the fire service."

In Mid and West Wales, Llanfyllin station is the latest to come over en masse (bar one) from the RFU. RFU membership has all but collapsed in Abergavenny in South Wales with nearly every RFU member switching to the FBU.

It's the same story in North Wales says Grant: "Most at Llanfairfechan fire station have come over to the FBU and all of the new recruits are enquiring about joining the FBU. It's clear to everyone that the FBU is the professional voice of the fire service."

"I work retained duty and I've seen the membership figures claimed by the RFU and

they just don't add up with the evidence we see at stations. I'm not sure how many of the members they claim are actually still serving, or for that matter, still living!"

In the East of England members are signing up in increasing numbers too. Micky Rogers, FBU divisional secretary in Essex, says 20 RDS firefighters have decided to join in recent months. Micky has visited eight stations over the past two months to hear local concerns and add them to the Union's negotiation workload.

He says: "RDS firefighters have worries about pensions, turn-out times and cuts proposals under the latest integrated risk management plan put forward by the brigade. We are working hard to address them."

In Scotland membership is growing too, with gains in a number of brigades. In the Highlands & Islands, for example, there has been a great deal of interest among new RDS firefighters in joining the Union, following the conversion of 61 auxiliary stations to retained status, a move that followed strong campaigning by the FBU for more investment in Highlands & Islands Fire Service. With new resources have come greater responsibilities, and together with changes in working conditions, there are demands among these RDS firefighters for a fighting union ready and willing to negotiate effectively in support of its members, says brigade chair Fraser Parr.

With so many RDS firefighters joining, we at *Alerter* thought we would contact some of our new members, to find out who they are, how they came to us and what concerns they have for themselves, their colleagues and for the Retained Duty System.



Holbeach crew, Lincolnshire

ALASDAIR MACLEAN

52, Dunvegan station, Highlands & Islands
(Was an auxiliary station but now retained)
17 years service, all at Dunvegan

Role: Watch Manager
Station equipment: one pump
40/50 shouts a year

I joined the FBU about a year and a half ago because I want more back-up and greater security. There are 10 firefighters at our station, nine of whom are in the FBU. We hope to be 100% soon. An FBU rep – Fraser Parr – came and spoke to us and eight of us joined in one night.

I'm also a member of the post office union, CWU. I'm a firm believer in trade unions and more so these days because of the prevailing blame culture.

I'd like to see the union look into the issue of holidays. They changed our station to a retained station two years ago and we lost what we see as our correct holiday entitlement. The brigade said it would only count our two years as a retained station rather than take into account the 17 years total service I have. If they counted the 17 years I'd have five weeks holiday, whereas now I have four.

MALCOLM MUSHING

45, Torquay station, Devon and Somerset
20 years service, all at Torquay

Role: Watch Manager
Station equipment: two wholetime pumps, one retained pump, hydraulic platform, water tender, 4x4 Ranger



I joined the FBU because I was disillusioned with the RFU. I had been with the RFU for over 20 years. The RFU has no teeth and they never talked to their members about what they wanted. I saw all the local campaigns by the FBU, particularly for the platform ladder and thought they were great. I want a stronger union, an insurance policy – as I'm afraid of cutbacks.

An FBU rep came to our station in November last year and the whole station decided to join that night. All RDS were previously RFU. They'd been thinking about it for over a year. I'm not a member of any other union.

PETER BYRNE

48, **Torquay station**, Devon and Somerset
23 years service, all in Torquay

Role: Crew Manager

Station equipment: two wholifetime pumps, one retained pump, hydraulic platform, water tender, 4x4 Ranger

I joined the FBU because it's retained friendly. It's got a retained section giving specific representation to RDS firefighters. Also, if your wholifetime colleagues are members of a different union sometimes it presents working issues and organisation problems and myself and my RDS colleagues felt it would be better



Torquay crew, Devon and Somerset

if we were all in the same union.

Two FBU reps came to talk to us and were open and frank. They just said what they had to offer. It was informal and very useful.

I'm not a member of another union.

What I want from the FBU is back-up, legal costs, accident cover and a representative voice at a higher level. The majority of the station is now FBU, probably about 85%.

I'm concerned about service cuts but the local FBU campaigns seem to be addressing this.

SEAN TAYLOR

32, **Holbeach station**, Lincolnshire

14 years service, all at Holbeach

Role: Firefighter

Station equipment: one pump and ladder
150 shouts a year

I joined the FBU because we needed more support as we had trouble at the station and we had nowhere to turn. The brigade forced us to change our drill night without any consultation. It had been the same for over 12 years.

It was all getting a bit messy until the only FBU member in the station said he'd give his union a call.

The FBU came in and sorted it. We thought "Wow – what great support". They then asked us if we wanted a presentation, which we did. Following that seven of us joined in one hit that night.

Everything I heard that night I thought was fantastic, particularly the lump sum to your family if you die in service. I was a member of the RFU for five years and I couldn't tell you what they stand for. There are 13 firefighters on our station, seven are now FBU.

I'm not a member of any other union.

GARY CLARKE

22, **Weeley Station**, Essex

Two years service

Role: Firefighter

Station equipment: 1 pump
200 shouts a year

I joined for a couple of reasons – firstly, security, if I need help and, secondly, if I have an accident there's the reassurance that there'd be somebody there for my family.



Weeley crew, Essex

A rep came from Colchester and six of us signed up at the same time. There are 14 crew at our station, nine are FBU members.

It's the only union I'm a member of.

One of my main concerns is being able to go wholifetime at some stage in the future. Why should it be harder for the retained to go wholifetime than someone coming in off the street?

Very often the retained are treated like second class citizens. There's quite a few retained who would at some stage like to go wholifetime and I'd like to know how the union can help us do this.

DARREN GOODGER

38, **Weeley Station**, Essex

One years service

Role: Firefighter

Station equipment: 1 pump
200 shouts a year

My father was wholifetime and an FBU member for over 25 years. So I joined for all the obvious benefits, which I'd known about all my life. The majority of our crew were in the FBU and I wanted to be with the majority.

The rep who came to us was very convincing.

It's my only union.

RICHARD NEWELL

52, **Abergavenny Station**, South Wales

31 years service

Role: Crew Manager

Station equipment: 1 water ladder, 1 rescue/water tender, 1 4x4.
350/400 shouts a year

I left the RFU to join the FBU at the same time as a whole group of the lads at the station. We could see Lyndon Jones the FBU rep was doing a really good job and supplying the FBU members with loads of up-to-date information.

I also used to be a UCATT member as well as a member of the RFU. Now 95% of the RDS at Abergavenny are FBU.

I'm very happy with the work the FBU is doing, although I have queries about the brigade's pension provision but I'm already talking to Lyndon about that.

Remember the dead, fight for the living

Hundreds of hours of work by FBU officials and the Union's solicitors are just the start of the long process of investigating the Atherstone fire

When the tragic news reached the FBU late on the night of Friday 2 November that one firefighter was dead and three firefighters were missing following their attendance at a warehouse fire in Atherstone-on-Stour in Warwickshire, everyone was shocked.

But as a Union whose over-riding concern is the welfare of its members and their families, there was not a minute to lose. FBU Warwickshire brigade secretary Tom Conn had taken the call at about 10pm and he immediately called FBU Region 7 regional secretary Tony Nutting, who in turn got straight on the phone to regional official Pete Goulden. General Secretary Matt Wrack and John McGhee, national officer responsible for health and safety were also alerted – and within the hour the FBU support machine was up and running, supporting members in their hour of need..

John McGhee arranged a meeting for 8am the following morning, at Leamington Spa fire station – the brigade's headquarters.

Attending that Saturday morning, along with Tom Conn, Pete Goulden and John McGhee, were regional officials Tony Nutting, Tony Larose and Chris Woods, brigade safety rep Marcus Giles, Executive Council member for Region 7, Dave Whatton, and Dianne Yates, a solicitor from the local office of the Union's lawyers Thompsons.

That meeting set in train action on a

number of key tasks – from support to the families of Ian Reid, John Averis, Ashley Stephens and Darren Yates-Badley, their closest colleagues at Alcester (a retained station) and Stratford Upon Avon, other FBU members in Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester and West Midlands – to the launch of the FBU's own accident investigation into the tragic events that had taken place.

In all, a team of 16 officials – brigade reps from Warwickshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands and Hereford & Worcester, members of the Union's brigade and regional committees, plus John McGhee from Head Office – was assembled to help in the effort. And there was a substantial legal team too: lawyers from

Thompsons' local and national offices, four criminal lawyers and three health and safety specialists on standby.

First and foremost, the Union had to ensure that they gave whatever support was required to the families of the four firefighters. Tom Conn, immediately set to work on this, together with the brigade's family liaison officers. "We understand the great distress faced by the members' families and close work colleagues at this time," he says. "Of course, it's part of the watch culture to support each other. It's like a family. The brigade has its own people supporting families of the bereaved. And as a Union, we've been endeavouring to do what we can to help. We've been endeavouring to listen to concerns and give advice. Our telephones have been on 24/7."



Family and friends leave a memorial service in January to remember the four firefighters killed in the warehouse blaze. Hundreds of firefighters and many FBU officials attended

Families or other nominees of the bereaved are entitled under the FBU's Accident and Injury Fund (AIF) to a payment in the event of death – legal issues allow the Union to release an initial £5,000 with the remainder paid out at a later date. That was the case for three of the four Warwickshire firefighters who died. One had taken the decision not to join the AIF*. However, officials decided at the Warwickshire FBU brigade committee meeting to assist where they could, providing £5,000 to the family from an existing strike fund.

"The brigade committee felt that this was an appropriate use of the hardship fund as it would relieve any immediate financial burden on the family," said Tom Conn.

In parallel to the support for the families and close work colleagues, the other key job of the Union was to ensure it helped all FBU members in the ensuing police-led investigation. As the prime investigators conducting the investigation together with the Health and Safety Executive working under agreed workplace death protocols, Warwickshire police immediately wanted to interview FBU members as witnesses. This began on the Saturday, the day after the fire, and while three members remained missing (They were confirmed dead on the Tuesday, November 5).

The following days and weeks were to be a



JUSTIN TALLIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Firefighters at the scene of the warehouse fire

FBU members, the FBU carries out its own investigation into the incident.

And as with earlier FBU investigations, such as Bethnal Green, Harrow Court and Marlie Farm, the Union is determined to ensure that the police and HSE understand the culture of the fire service – from the IRMP process to RDS training – that helped determine the outcome of events, that they do not look just at the incident but at what happened leading up to it and what safety culture exists.

As well as drawing on their own knowledge and experience of practice in Warwickshire, local officials have been liaising with FBU officials in other brigades to identify best practice – including areas as specialised as guidance for fighting fires in warehouses – and the Union has had discussions with others outside the service, such as the TUC's in-house health and safety experts.

This critical information on the brigade's safety culture was then passed on to the HSE, as well as questions being put, in regular meetings with the organisation.

Contact with HSE field investigators was established the day after the fire. The FBU has also been meeting regularly with the police.

The Union had sought a joint investigation with the brigade – always the FBU's preferred option. "We are not looking for blame," says John McGhee. "We are looking to establish the facts and improve safety so we can avoid tragedies in the future." Warwickshire Fire Service was not willing to conduct a joint investigation.

On 16 January, the HSE issued Warwickshire with a provisional improvement notice, in which it stated that from evidence gathered from its investigation thus far: "the current arrangements employed by the Fire and Rescue Authority do not comply with the statutory duties to provide its firefighters with all the information they should have to assist them in making the appropriate decisions when attending a fire."

The notice required the Fire and Rescue Authority to make the appropriate arrangements to gather and take action in response

to information about special risks which may be present at premises where firefighters may have to deal with emergencies and is "one step toward ensuring that Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority fully complies with its duties for the protection of firefighters in the future."

The FBU has strongly welcomed the improvement notice, including the HSE's view that "the brave men and women in the emergency services deserve to have the right equipment, the right training and information whilst fulfilling their pledge to protect the public".

That has always been, and continues to be a central demand of the Union in Warwickshire and elsewhere in the country.

Said John McGhee: "Our members are real-life heroes, protecting the public day in day out, and we will fight to ensure that every fire authority makes their health and safety a priority.

"Although the improvement notice was served on Warwickshire County Council (acting as Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service), the FBU view is simply that all fire and rescue authorities must be able to demonstrate that they can comply with it. The improvement notice goes to the heart of the integrated risk management process. If fire brigades don't gather information on risks

properly, how can you accurately assess the resources required to deal with them?"

The Union and its officials, whether from FBU head office, regional office or within brigades will continue to co-operate with the police and the HSE, while working tirelessly on the FBU's own investigation into this tragedy. And the FBU will continue to support the families and members throughout, including representing them when the inquest – which opened on 20 November and quickly adjourned – eventually resumes.

All members will be kept up to date with developments in the investigation.

* Opting into the AIF costs some £3,60 a month, less than the equivalent of one turnout.

'We will fight to ensure that every fire authority makes health and safety a priority'

gruelling time for the FBU members involved in the incident, many of whom were very shaken and upset by the events. The union wanted to make sure that everyone, from the stations responding in the first wave to the fire, to the supporting teams that were drafted in the days after the fire, were able to prepare as best they could for their interviews, and were supported properly during the interview process.

So one of the priorities for the Union and its legal team was to obtain from the police a list of interviewees. They then met with all the members prior to the interviews and made sure they had an FBU lawyer and FBU rep present. By mid-December over 90 FBU members had been interviewed by the police. Each police interview took around three hours on average – that's some 270 hours in total, and when you include up to two hours for preparation prior to the police interview, that's close on 350 person-hours.

Part of the support and protection of FBU members provided by the Union was to establish strict protocols determining how all members were to be interviewed by the police. For example, the police had wanted to videotape the interviews – the Union successfully argued against this as unnecessarily intrusive.

As with every case where there is a fatality, serious injury or even a near miss involving



HUMBERSIDE

The most savage cuts ever have been proposed by the fire and rescue service

Senior managers want to save £4 million over the next three years by closing four fire stations (Sledmere, Waltham, Kirton Lindsey and Hull Central), removing a fire engine at another (Immingham West) and ending the immediate response capability of a fire engine at another (Goole).

As fire appliances can attend, assist, support and provide cover well outside their station areas, these cuts will have an impact across Humberside.

The cuts will see the loss of one in ten frontline firefighter posts. If the plans go ahead we would have between 100 and 110 fewer frontline firefighters to deal with all

These cuts will rob the community of vital resources that save the community, a service staffed by people in that community who know that community

the emergency incidents the fire and rescue service needs to respond to.

One of the three RDS stations facing closure is Waltham, which covers the suburb of Grimsby, a rapidly growing residential area, 17 villages and, in an arrangement with the neighbouring brigade, over the border, a large part of Lincolnshire.

All 18 of us at Waltham fire station are all putting in 100% to fight these cuts. With excellent support from local FBU officials and the sterling work of Waltham's former watch

manager Ivor Appleton, MBE, we have two petitions running – one, hand-written with 8,500 signatures, and hundreds more on an online petition.

Furthermore, we've collected 2,500 official objections from members of the public.

We've been knocking on doors of every house in Waltham. We've been to seven parish council meetings and two main council meetings. We've organised a car wash on the fire station forecourt to raise awareness of the issue. And it's rare an evening when we don't have a letter or article in our local newspaper.

A growing number of councillors across Humberside are making their opposition to the cuts clear and MPs too.

Public support is excellent and we'll keep this campaign going right up until the end of the integrated risk management plan consultation period of the 31 March. We are remaining positive that the fire and rescue authority will see sense.

We are 100% available, experienced and dedicated frontline public servants, dedicated to protecting our communities.

These cuts will rob the community of vital resources that save the community, a service staffed by people in that community who know that community.

**Carl Lamb,
Waltham watch manager**

For more information visit www.walthamfirestation.co.uk/save_the_station.htm and the online petition: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/savewalthamfirestation/>

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